

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 GUATEM 02266 01 OF 02 172320Z
ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9943
INFO USINTSEC HAVANA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 2266

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PINT, PDIP, PINS, MASS, SHUM, SNAR, GT, CU, PN
HO, ES
SUBJ: VIEWS OF VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT VILLAGRAN KRAMER

1. SUMMARY: IN RECENT INFORMAL TOUR D'HORIZON, VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT LENT SUPPORT TO IMPRESSION THAT THE INCOMING LUCAS ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT PRESAGE RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF GUATEMALA SOCIETY OR POLICY, DESPITE PROGRESSIVE PRETENSIONS. SPECIFICALLY, HE SAW BEGINNINGS OF NORMALIZATION WITH CUBA AT BEST SEVERAL YEARS AWAY; HOPED THAT REINVIGORATION OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN COMMON MARKET WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY CENTRAL AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN TIES; EXPECTED CONTINUED STRESS ON DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN AREAS; IMPLIED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM IN RURAL AREAS MIGHT BE BEYOND GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO RECTIFY; GAVE BROAD-BRUSH ENDORSEMENT OF US PROGRAMS IN GUATEMALA; AND
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 GUATEM 02266 01 OF 02 172320Z

SUGGESTED GOG WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT CONDITIONED SALE OF F-5 AIRCRAFT. END SUMMARY

2. AMBASSADOR AND CHIEF OF POLITICAL SECTION MET INFORMALLY APRIL 13 WITH VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT FRANCISCO VILLAGRAN KRAMER. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS WIDE-RANGING CONVERSATION (BELIZE PORTION REPORTED SEPARATELY):

3. RELATIONS WITH CUBA AND PANAMA. VILLAGRAN APPEARED TO RETREAT FROM THE IMPLICATION WE TOOK FROM AN EARLIER CONVERSATION WITH HIM THAT THE LUCAS GOVERNMENT MIGHT SEEK AN EARLY RAPPROCHEMENT WITH CUBA IN ORDER TO NEUTRALIZE THE LOCAL GUERRILLA PROBLEM. NOTING THE BUILT-IN RESISTANCE SUCH MOVES COULD BE EXPECTED TO EVOKE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND WITH THE MILITARY, VILLAGRAN THOUGHT THE TIME FOR SUCH AN INITIATIVE WOULD NOT BE RIPE FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER TWO TO THREE YEARS. EVEN THEN, CUBA WILLING, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE LIMITED TO COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND PERHAPS EXCHANGE OF HONORARY CONSULS. VILLAGRAN BELIEVED A STARTING POINT FOR SOME NORMALIZATION WILL BE FOUND IN THE AREA OF COMMON COMMODITY INTERESTS -- NICKEL, COFFEE AND SUGAR. WHEN THE TIME CAME THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ASKING THE USG FOR ADVICE ON WHERE TO START THIS CAUTIOUS STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT THE USG IS NOT RUSHING BLINDLY INTO NORMALIZATION, AND STILL HAD A LONG WAY TO GO. VILLAGRAN COMMENTED THAT HIS FRIEND TORRIJOS IS EQUALLY WARY. HE EXPECTED THAT FOR THE TIME BEING THE GOG WOULD DEAL WITH CUBA THROUGH TORRIJOS. UNSTATED, BUT IMPLICIT, WAS THE INTENT OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION TO RENEW DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PANAMA.

4. HONDURAN-SALVADORAN PROGRESS. VILLAGRAN DISPLAYED OPTIMISM ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR A HONDURAN-SALVADORAN SETTLEMENT. HE DISCLOSED HE HAD HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH THE FOREIGN AND CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 GUATEM 02266 01 OF 02 172320Z

ECONOMIC MINISTERS AND THE CENTRAL BANK PRESIDENTS OF HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR WHO HAD MET QUIETLY HERE EARLIER IN THE MONTH. BESIDES THE BORDER DISPUTE, VILLAGRAN SAID THESE OFFICIALS HAD DISCUSSED REORGANIZATION OF THE COMMON MARKET, INCLUDING REVISION OF THE INTEGRATION TREATY. HE FOUND BOTH COUNTRIES, IN ADDITION, INTERESTED IN EXPANDING CENTRAL AMERICAN TIES WITH THE CARIBBEAN, A FAVORITE VILLAGRAN THEME.

5. DOMESTIC PROGRAMS. VILLAGRAN DID NOT GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE LUCAS ADMINISTRATION SAW ITSELF REMAKING GUATEMALAN SOCIETY IN ANY DRAMATIC WAY. HOWEVER, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIAN HIGHLANDS WOULD BE LUCAS' FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT ORDER OF BUSINESS. THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION'S EMPHASIS ON COOPERATIVES WOULD BE CONTINUED. LUCAS' STYLE WAS TO ENGAGE IN INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH INTEREST GROUPS IN AN ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE STEP-BY-STEP PROGRESS. HE NOTED THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS PRESSING LUCAS TO ABOLISH PRICE CONTROLS; LUCAS IN AGREEABLE PROVIDED THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS WILLING TO MAKE COMPENSATORY WAGE CONCESSIONS. VILLAGRAN EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO DO MUCH TO INCREASE DIRECT TAX REVENUES WITHOUT OUTSIDE PRESSURES (I.E., FROM THE IFI'S), WHICH WERE UNLIKELY TO BE FORTHCOMING GIVEN

GUATEMALA'S HEALTHY FISCAL SITUATION.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS. VILLAGRAN TOOK PERSONAL CREDIT FOR THE GOG'S MOVE TO RATIFY THE SAN JOSE CONVENTION. (COMMENT: WE DISCOUNT THIS.) HE SAID HE WOULD NOT HAVE ACCEPTED THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION HAD HE NOT RECEIVED A COMMITMENT (PRESUMABLY FROM LUCAS) THAT HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD BE RESPECTED UNDER THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. A KEY ELEMENT, HE SAID, WOULD BE THE NEW JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS. MANY OF THE CURRENT JUDICIARY, WHICH IS REPLACED OR RENEWED WHENEVER A NEW PRESIDENT TAKES OFFICE, WERE "APPOINTEES" OF THE MLN'S MARIO SANDOVAL AND HENCE UNRESPONSIVE TO HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS. IT WOULD BE A GREAT ADVANCE IF THE NEW GOVERNMENT PROVES ABLE TO NAME HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES TO EVEN HALF OF THE JUDICIAL POSTS. (CONGRESS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 GUATEM 02266 01 OF 02 172320Z

SELECTS THE HIGHER MAGISTRATES, INCLUDING THE SUPREME COURT, WHICH APPOINTS LOWER COURT JUDGES.) ASKED HOW THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION PLANNED TO GRAPPLE WITH THE CHRONIC VIOLENCE AND UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCES IN RURAL AREAS, VILLAGRAN LOOKED SKYWARD, ALLUDED TO SUCH POLITICAL "REALITIES" AS ARANA, SANDOVAL AND THE EGP, AND THEN ASKED WHAT ASSISTANCE WE WERE PREPARED TO OFFER. HE LATER CONCEDED THAT THIS WAS NOT A PROPER AREA FOR US ASSISTANCE. THE AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED THE SERIOUSNESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS FOR FUTURE BILATERAL RELATIONS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 02266 02 OF 02 172336Z
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USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 2266
LIMDIS

7. U.S. PROGRAMS IN GUATEMALA. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED VILLAGRAN HOW HE SAW US/GOG RELATIONS -- WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING OR NOT DOING, WHAT COULD WE BE DOING BETTER? SPEAKING GENERALLY, VILLAGRAN SAID THAT OUR PROGRAMS WERE FINE. HE HOPED WE COULD DO EVEN MORE WITH COOPERATIVES. AT ONE POINT, HOWEVER, HE SAID WITH A STRAIGHT FACE THAT THE PEACE CORPS SHOULD GO SINCE "THEY ARE SPIES IN TRAINING." CHALLENGED, HE BACKTRACKED, ALLOWING THAT THIS WAS NOT A VIEW HE OR LUCAS HELD BUT WAS WIDESPREAD WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY. VILLAGRAN SHOWED SOME AWARENESS OF DEA'S ANTI-NARCOTICS PROGRAM IN GUATEMALA AND EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR ITS CONTINUATION. HE ALSO SEEMED TO APPRECIATE THE MAGNITUDE OF THE US ILLEGAL ALIEN PROBLEM AND EXPRESSED SYMPATHY WITH THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH TO IT. HE ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE GUATEMALAN "BRAIN DRAIN" TO THE UNITED STATES.

8. F-5 AIRCRAFT. VILLAGRAN INTRODUCED THE SUBJECT OF THE PENDING F-5 REQUEST IN THE CONTEXT OF BELIZE. ONE OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 GUATEM 02266 02 OF 02 172336Z

REASONS THE GOG PERSISTED IN PUSHING FOR F-5'S WAS TO CONVINCE BELIZEAN PREMIER PRICE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE GUATEMALAN THREAT TO INVADE BELIZE IN THE EVENT OF UNILATERAL INDEPENDENCE. (COMMENT: THIS IS HARD TO SQUARE WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SPIEGELER'S OUTRAGE WHEN THE US PRESS GOT HOLD OF THE NEWS OF THE GOG REQUEST.) NEVERTHELESS, VILLAGRAN SAID, THE LUCAS ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE SALE OF F-5'S CONDITIONED ON THEIR NOT BEING USED IN THE BELIZE CONTEXT.

9. MLN TACTICS. MLN LEADER MARIO SANDOVAL WAS TOO COMPETENT A LAWYER TO MAKE UNWITTINGLY THE OBVIOUS TECHNICAL ERRORS THE MLN HAS MADE IN ITS SERIES OF LEGAL PETITIONS TO VOID THE MARCH 5 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. VILLAGRAN SAW SANDOVAL TRYING TO DRAG OUT THE PROCESS INDIFINITELY -- TO JULY 1 IF POSSIBLE -- TO EMBARRASS THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION. SANDOVAL'S CONDITION FOR ENDING THE LEGAL HASSLE IS LUCAS' ASSURANCE THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ACT TO DISARM THE MLN, SOMETHING LUCAS WILL NOT AGREE TO.

10. VILLAGRAN'S ROLE IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. ASKED WHETHER HE SAW HIMSELF AS A KIND OF DE FACTO FOREIGN MINISTER IN THE LUCAS ADMINISTRATION, VILLAGRAN SAID HE EXPECTED TO OVERSEE CENTRAL AMERICAN INTEGRATION MATTERS AND HAD MUCH INTEREST IN COMMODITY

ISSUES, BUT INTIMATED HE DID NOT ASPIRE TO A FRONT-LINE ROLE IN OTHER FOREIGN POLICY AREAS. HE RESISTED SPECULATION THAT HE WOULD BE AN "ACTIVIST" VICE PRESIDENT.

11. COMMENT: VILLAGRAN'S PRESENTATION WAS NOT SUCH AS TO LEAD US TO EXPECT RADICAL CHANGES IN GUATEMALAN SOCIETY OR POLICY UNDER THE NEW REGIME. THOUGH WE MAY WELL SEE SOME EFFORT TO CHANGE GUATEMALA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THIRD WORLD AND COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, HIS DOWN-PLAYING OF THE PROSPECTS FOR EARLY RAPPROCHEMENT WITH CUBA PROBABLY REFLECTS A REALIZATION
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PAGE 03 GUATEM 02266 02 OF 02 172336Z

OF THE RESISTANCE SUCH DEPARTURES WOULD ENGENDER IN THE GUATEMALAN ESTABLISHMENT. VILLAGRAN APPEARED TO BE MAKING AN EFFORT TO PORTRAY THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION AS PROGRESSIVE, ALBEIT FACING OBSTACLES FROM ENTRENCHED INTERESTS, AND HIMSELF AS EMINENTLY PRAGMATIC AND REASONABLE. HE ALSO GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT WHILE HE WOULD INTEREST HIMSELF IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, HE WOULD HAVE LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT LUCAS' MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC POLICY.

12. WE ARE PREPARED TO TAKE AT FACE VALUE VILLAGRAN'S INFLUENCE WITH LUCAS (THEIR ASSOCIATION DATES FROM THE TIME BOTH WERE IN EXILE -- LUCAS AS MILITARY ATTACHE -- IN SAN SALVADOR DURING THE PERALTA AZURDIA GOVERNMENT), BUT WE CANNOT GAUGE AT THIS TIME TO WHAT EXTENT VILLAGRAN MIRRORS LUCAS' VIEWS ON SPECIFICS.
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